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CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — Extensions of Remarks

October 2, 1985

Now the forces of nature have done what the developers could not.

DEVASTATION OF HURRICANE

Hurricane Elena, which brushed Apalachicola, with 95-mile-an-hour winds at the beginning of September, created conditions that killed up to 90 percent of the oysters in the bay. Experts say it will take two years or longer before oysters will again be ready for commercial harvesting.

"Might be eight to 10 years before things get back to the way they was," observed Curtis Gilbert, a third-generation oysterman. Mr. Gilbert, a medium-size man 30 years old with the thick arms of one who has worked since the age of 12 out on the bay hauling oysters from the water with 12-foot-long tongs, was standing in line inside the gymnasium of the Brown Elementary School here, waiting to sign forms for Federal disaster relief.

There are some 1,000 men like Mr. Gilbert who work the oyster beds in Apalachicola Bay, and 3,000 others who depend in one way or another on the oyster for a living. When the hurricane's sustained northeast winds drove a carpet of mud and silt across the beds, suffocating the oysters, the men's livelihoods died with the shellfish.

"I went out a few days after the storm," Mr. Gilbert recalled mournfully. "There was nothing but mounds of sand where there used to be oysters."

Loss of the oysters, the mainstay of the \$20 million seafood industry derived from the 200-square-mile system of bays nourished by the Apalachicola River, was the biggest blow the storm delivered to Florida. The state escaped the full force of the hurricane as it stalled in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast before reversing itself and backtracking to a landfill in Louisiana.

Still, storm damage in Florida totaled \$75 million, according to Tom Lewis Jr., Secretary of the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

"The damage is worse than I thought it would be, considering Elena only gave us a peck on the cheek," Mr. Lewis said. "I hate to think of the disaster that a good solid kiss would have meant."

Beach erosion and damage to waterfront properties were concentrated farther to the south, north of St. Petersburg, he said. "The beach at Indian Rocks is now a sandbar out in the Gulf," he added.

NEW BUILDING GUIDELINES

Redevelopment of that area is presenting thorny issues to a state that is attempting to slow down or end construction along the coast. The Legislature has created guidelines that beginning next year will prevent owners of storm-damaged homes from rebuilding unless they conform with higher standards of construction, such as elevating the structure and assuring that it can withstand winds of 140 miles an hour.

Franklin County, which embraces Apalachicola Bay, was already one of the poorest in the state before Elena struck. With fewer than 6,000 residents, many of them poorly educated and living on the hard edge of poverty, there are few choices open to workers other than taking up the time-honored but difficult task of harvesting oysters.

In recent years a controversy flared over a move by outside investors to build a 386-room hotel, a tennis complex, a marina and 381 condominium units on the western end of St. George Island. The project was seen as a step to create a resort playground similar to Hilton Head, a successful development on a South Carolina barrier island. Oystermen joined with environmentalists to oppose the application, but major portions of it were approved this year, and the fight

continues over whether the developers will be granted the right to dig a marina.

St. George, connected to the mainland by a 4.4-mile bridge and causeway link, already has more than 400 dwellings, mostly vacation homes, and some 300 permanent residents. The hurricane washed out part of the causeway and for two weeks residents and schoolchildren used a ferry to reach the mainland until the damage was repaired.

Backers of the project contended it would help bring economic diversity to the area and that the plans contained enough safeguards to protect the bay from pollutants.

Tens of millions of dollars has been spent by the state and the Federal Government to protect Apalachicola Bay and its estuary, with the result that it is one of the cleanest big-river systems in the United States.

The bay's shallowness (its average depth is less than seven feet), low-salinity levels and other elements combine to make it one of the most productive oyster breeding grounds anywhere, according to Robert J. Livingston, director of the Center for Aquatic Research and Resource Management at Florida State University. Dr. Livingston is considered a leading expert on the bay and its oysters.

IRONY OF NATURAL DISASTER

"A striking irony of this is that a lot of time and money has been spent protecting this resource from man and now a natural disaster has wiped out oyster production," he observed.

The storm also struck at the end of the spawning season, which means that regeneration will not begin on a large scale until the end of next summer, he said.

"In the short term it will be very hard on the people who depend on the bay for their livelihood, but the bay's going to come back," he added. "It's just a matter of time."

Too long a time for oystermen like Curtis Gilbert. "If I get the chance, I'm clearing out," he said. "This is the end as far as I'm concerned," he added in a pause in the processing of his application for unemployment assistance. He held his 2-year-old son, Lee, on a knee as he waited on makeshift bleachers set up in the school gym.

"Maybe it's too late for me to get out, but not for him," he continued, indicating his son with a nod of his head. "It's too hard a life. There has to be something more for him than tonging oysters all his life."

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

HON. ELDON RUDD

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 2, 1985

Mr. RUDD. Mr. Speaker, the budget resolution adopted in August is filled with smoke and mirrors. The House and Senate Budget Committees report its savings at differing levels—\$57.5 billion and \$55.5 billion respectively—contrasted with the Congressional Budget Office's estimate of only \$39 billion in fiscal year 1986.

Regardless of which of these projections you believe, however, it's clear we haven't gone far enough because deficits will still be in the range of \$200 billion annually.

Difficult choices are ahead of us. A constituent of mine, John Young, of Phoenix, AZ, recently wrote an open letter to Congress with some thought-provoking remarks about deficit spending and the need

for decisive action by Congress. I ask unanimous consent that Mr. Young's letter be printed in the RECORD at this point for my colleague's review.

An Open Letter to the Congress of the United States:

Most of us out here in the real world know what is wrong with the federal budget and how to fix it. We also know how the deficit got so large and we are pretty certain it will continue to grow.

We are also certain those of you in congress know all of these things too, but you probably are not really that serious about putting things in order. You will raise the total debt ceiling to two trillion dollars. You are currently playing political football with a 50 billion dollar deficit reduction bill in the shadow of a 200 billion dollar per year mountain of red ink. This is going to be a real fix of the old system, right? Wrong.

The debt is a direct result of years of promising us something for nothing—free lunches so to speak, and delivering on those promises. You also got us into a couple of wars along the way, wasted huge sums of money, lost the wars and seriously demoralized us as an added benefit. The end result of this huge debt will be inflation, then depression and economic and social chaos.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it" does not apply here. It is broke and in desperate need of fixing. We know that the budget can be balanced by a planned and systematic reduction in spending, by insisting on getting fair value for that spending, by letting private enterprise take over all of the things the government does poorly (mail delivery would be a good place to begin), and last of all by collecting taxes on a fair and equal basis through the least complicated flat tax system conceivable.

You have to recognize the difference between a hand and a hand out, between wants and needs. All programs that serve any real purpose should be immediately put on a needs test basis. We believe each person should be given the freedom to work out his own destiny. Freedom is more important than security. We must be allowed to succeed and fail. You've probably forgotten, but the word is "free" enterprise.

The only legitimate purposes of government, as established by the Constitution, are protection against foreign enemies (invasion) maintenance of law and order domestically (putting down insurrection and riots), and ensuring justice (enforcing contracts).

Now here's the hard part! You have to tell us there will be no more free lunches; no subsidies for not working or producing, no cost-plus contracts, no fact-finding junkets (that's a tough one), no more gain with no pain. And, from now on, everyone pays his fair share. The word "rights" should be hyphenated to become rights-responsibilities. You must also pledge never to begin the free lunch promises over again by providing a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution. That's going to be really tough!

"But," you say, "my re-election will be in jeopardy." If re-election is that important to you, then you probably shouldn't be there in the first place. After all, you are our elected representatives, the caretakers of our country, serving in the congress on our behalf.

We really don't think you will do it. You will keep talking, playing politics, pointing fingers, and blaming everyone and everything. You should have mirrors mounted on your desks for the finger pointing exercises. And, if you don't do it, the consequences will be the greatly diminished capacity and

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EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

FEDERAL PENSIONS

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 2, 1985

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I would like to insert my Washington Report for Wednesday, October 2, 1985, into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

FEDERAL PENSIONS

Like other employers, the U.S. government has a duty to offer its employees pension programs that provide for security after retirement or disability. Military and civilian pensions have been valuable in attracting and retaining quality personnel in public service. However, their price has grown to over \$40 billion, 5% of the federal budget. Pensions have become the feature of federal employment mentioned most often to me by Hoosiers, and an area of federal spending in which they are increasingly interested.

FEDERAL RETIREMENT SYSTEM

The Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) allows retirement without benefit penalty at age 55 for employees with 30 years of service. CSRS provides automatic annual cost-of-living-adjustments (COLA) equal to changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The system is funded by employees, who pay 7% of their gross annual pay, by matching contributions from employing agencies, by interest from CSRS trust fund assets, and by direct revenues from the U.S. Treasury. Revenues in 1984 totaled \$36 billion, including \$4.4 billion paid by employees, and about \$22 billion was paid in benefits.

Ballooning costs have led to criticism of the CSRS. The main charge is that the system is overly generous. A study commissioned by Congress and conducted by the Hay Group, a respected private consulting firm, recently found that, in the long term, average federal retirement benefits exceed those in the private sector. Also, private sector employees wait until ages 62 or 65 before retiring with full benefits, and receive COLAs averaging only one-third of the CPI. A second criticism is that the system is too costly: CSRS payments are 25% of payroll, but private sector pension plans take only 18%. Critics also predict future insolvency of the system. The pension's unfunded liability—the amount the government is obligated to pay present and eligible retirees—is \$528 billion and grows by \$1 billion a month.

Supporters of CSRS point out that when total compensation—both pay and benefits—is compared, federal employees trail private sector workers by 7.2%, lower pay and other benefits more than cancelling the advantage in pensions. Further, few federal employees take advantage of early retirement, retiring on average at age 61, just below the private sector average age of 62. Defenders also note that the plan continues to meet its obligations. The funding gap cited by critics is merely an "accounting fiction" that assumes all current workers will draw pensions, when only a third will actually do so.

MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEMS

Members of the armed services can retire at any age after 20 years of service and draw half their final salaries. Pension payments begin right after retirement and are adjusted annually for increases in the cost of living. Servicemen do not contribute to their retirement plan, although they do contribute to social security. The projected cost of the system in 1986 is \$18.2 billion.

Like the CSRS, the military pension is criticized for its price tag and generosity. Since 1975, cost increases have far outpaced inflation, tripling in just ten years. Pension payments now account for 55% of total military payroll. The automatic COLAs, the absence of any contribution by military personnel to their own retirement, and the availability of early retirement with immediate and full annuity are frequently cited as causing the increase.

Military pensions also seem to cause the military to lose experienced personnel to early retirement. The average age of retirement is 43 for officers and 40 for enlisted personnel. Military retirees can collect half their final salaries in pension benefits and also earn salaries in the private sector. At age 65 they can draw social security with no reduction in military benefits. The Defense Department says it needs big pensions to attract and retain qualified people, and that military personnel deserve extra benefits for undertaking the risk of war. But far from encouraging experienced personnel to remain in the military, current benefits are a strong incentive to leave the service after 20 years.

REFORM EFFORTS

In 1984, Congress set up an interim plan to supplement federal employee participation in social security while it studied ways to replace the current pension system. New government workers make full contributions to social security, and pay 1.3% to CSRS. The interim plan ends on December 31, 1985. Unless a new plan is developed or the temporary system continued, federal employees hired after January 1, 1984, will have to pay 7.05% of their salaries to social security and another 7% to CSRS.

One reform proposal would create a new pension plan built upon social security for workers hired after January 1, 1984. Savings in the plan would come from raising from 55 to 62 the age at which full retirement benefits could be received. Further savings would come from cutting COLAs to 2% below the CPI and basing retirement benefits on an average of the highest five years of salary, rather than on the highest three. The plan includes a capital accumulation plan (CAP), not offered in CSRS, to which employees could contribute up to 10% of pay, matched by a 5% employer contribution. With the CAP, benefits under this proposal would actually exceed those of CSRS for retirees age 62 and older.

Reforms in military pensions have also been undertaken. A bill now being considered would cut from \$18.2 billion to \$14.2 billion the sum paid into the military retirement trust fund in 1986. The proposal stipulates that savings can be made only by changing the amount of retirement benefits paid to future enlistees, forcing the Defense Department to recommend permanent changes in the military pension system and

to report to Congress how it will achieve the \$4 billion savings.

Although it is unclear what changes will be made in the pension systems, the issue cannot be avoided for long. Congress must look for reforms that restrain cost increases but retain features that attract skilled people to public service and encourage experienced workers to remain.

(Please help me update my mailing lists by notifying me of any incorrect or duplicate mailings.)

HURRICANE DAMAGE IN APALACHICOLA BAY

HON. DON FUQUA

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 2, 1985

Mr. FUQUA. Mr. Speaker, the people of Franklin and Wakulla Counties suffered immense damage as a result of Hurricane Elena. Apalachicola Bay is famous throughout the world for its oysters and it may be 2 years or more before they can be harvested again. This is a most serious economic blow to the thousands of people who depend on the oysters for their livelihood.

I wrote to President Reagan last week to urge that steps be taken to expedite Federal relief efforts to these counties which have already been designated as major disaster areas. I have received far too many complaints of excess bureaucracy and paperwork and these people need the assistance of their Government and they need it now.

Recently, the New York Times ran an article explaining the situation facing the people on Apalachicola Bay and I insert this article into the RECORD at this point and want to call to the attention of my colleagues the situation in Franklin and Wakulla Counties.

FLORIDA OYSTERS AND A HARDY LIVELIHOOD LEFT DEVASTATED AFTER HURRICANE ELENA

(By Jon Nordheimer)

APALACHICOLA, FLA.—For more than a century the oyster was the pride of bountiful Apalachicola Bay and a handy symbol of the hardy men who harvested the mollusks from the 6,000 acres of beds lying in shallow waters protected by offshore barrier islands.

In recent years the oystermen presented a tough, doughty exterior as they went about their bone-weary work out on the bay, hand-tonging oysters from the bottom. They clung tenaciously to old ways in a world that gripped them with viselike pressure to change.

They resisted plans to speed up the development of St. George Island, one of the barrier islands, fearing that the construction of resorts would pollute the bay and damage the oyster beds.

When they talked among themselves about the future on the flyblown docks of Eastpoint and Apalachicola, where mounds of sunbleached shells piled high outside the corrugated shucking sheds, they seemed vulnerable but never yielding.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.
 Boldface type indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.